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THE PROBLEM FROM THE STANDPOINT OF GENERAL LINGUISTICS

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As one who has had experience in teaching both ancient and modern languages, I feel keenly the evils of our present practice.

If we are agreed upon abandoning "logical" and "metaphysical" grammar, then it is our first duty to seek psychological categories as the basis of our nomenclature. In this matter we should do well to follow up the suggestions and adopt some of the methods of the psychologists. For many years they have talked more or less about "types" in the sense of psychical structures, if one may use the term, built up in the mind in the course of our daily experiences by a process of involuntary abstraction. The "type" may be described as consisting of a relatively permanent core (or center of crystallization) with various lines of association running out from it and connecting with individual experiences. Psychologists have defined such types of concrete objects, standards of comparison in reference to weights and measures and color appreciations. It remains for students of language to go farther and to identify and describe similar types covering the relationships (and other ideas) that make up syntax. That such categories have not as yet been found and accurately defined is plain (to take a single illustration) from the conflicting opinions current concerning the force (or forces) of the subjunctive mood. If a series of such types should be discovered and defined and shown to be associated with certain words or word-forms, they should form a thoroughly sound foundation for a system of nomenclature appropriate at least to the language from the study of which they were derived.

We should approach this problem first and foremost, as it seems to me, by the method of introspection. The material with which we work should be primarily contemporary experience in normal conversation in our own vernacular. Introspection of one's experiences in reading has secondary value, and still less confidence is to be placed in results derived from the study of foreign languages.

In addition to our neglect of the method of introspection applied as above suggested, we have erred by laying too great emphasis on the analytic side of our work and thus neglecting the synthetic side. We have not only been prone to separate a given form too completely from its context, but have also been inclined to overlook the composite character of the idea symbolized by a given form or set of forms.

Although I recognize the scientific and pedagogical value of accurate

scientific terms, I have usually been better satisfied with the student who could describe a function than with one who could merely name it. What we lose in time we gain in clearness.

THE PROBLEM FROM THE STANDPOINT OF THE ROMANCE LANGUAGES: FRENCH

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In adopting a uniform grammatical terminology the needs of those who make use of the textbooks ought to be considered first. Serious students of syntax, as a rule, have little trouble in understanding each other, even though they employ different terms. But school children are easily bewildered, and since this movement is to be especially for the benefit of high-school pupils I am heartily in favor of it. But I should like to call attention to what I believe to be a serious danger.

A scholar interested in syntax is anxious, of course, to reach generalizations that may be as broad as possible. Now the broader a generalization, the more difficult it is to understand. Thus Professor Hale may be right in classifying the subjunctive after verbs of fearing as he does, but it is extremely doubtful whether a high-school pupil could grasp his classification. Besides, the object of a high-school textbook is not to teach the syntax of Latin, or of French, or of any other language, but to teach the language itself. It is of little advantage to a high-school pupil to classify all the subjunctives he finds under, let us say, four heads; it is important, however, that he should see some reason why a verb is in the subjunctive. Perhaps it is because it expresses purpose, or result, or because it follows a verb of fearing, or a verb of commanding, or because the clause in which it occurs is concessive, or an indirect question. These are generalizations that a child can be brought to understand.

Just where the line between the broader and narrower generalizations should be drawn is difficult to decide. But it is better to err on the side of narrow generalizations than on the other side. The desire on the part of teachers and textbook-makers to make instruction in Latin an exercise in classification has been the bane of our high-school work. It has also been and is the refuge of the teacher who does not know enough of the language to lead pupils on to a ready understanding of the foreign text. Of course the harder the generalization is for the pupil the more time the incompetent teacher can devote to it.

A multiplicity of small generalizations is better than a few broad ones. Again, it is difficult to decide just what number of generalizations is de-